

Holy Week 2019

*And about the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying,
“Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?” that is, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”
(Matthew 27:46 ESV)*

But the angel said to the women, “Do not be afraid, for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified. He is not here, for he has risen, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay. Then go quickly and tell his disciples that he has risen from the dead, and behold, he is going before you to Galilee; there you will see him. See, I have told you.” (Matthew 28:5–7 ESV)

Come And See; Go And Tell

Easter Sunday

April 23rd, 2019

Matthew 28:1-20

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Introduction:

Good morning church. I'd like to invite you to open your Bibles to Matthew 28:1; that's on page 835 in your pew Bibles. On Friday we looked together at the story of the crucifixion and burial of Jesus Christ. The last verse that we read of that story mentions two women who were attending to the burial of the Lord. Matthew 27:61 says:

Mary Magdalene and the other Mary were there, sitting opposite the tomb. (Matthew 27:61 ESV)

Comparing with John's Gospel¹ leads us to understand that this “other Mary” was in fact Jesus' mother. These two women, along with Jesus' aunt, Mary's sister, kept vigil with Jesus until the moment of his death at which point they apparently took custody of his body along with Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus whereupon they laid him in Joseph's tomb and then went home to observe the Sabbath.

Now – early on Sunday morning, Matthew tells us that two of these ladies have come back to begin applying the spices and oils that were part of Jewish burial custom. We have Mary Magdalene and “the other Mary” – Jesus' mother. We pick up the story at chapter 28, verse 1. Hear now the Word of the Lord:

¹ See The Gospel Of John 19:25.

Now after the Sabbath, toward the dawn of the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb. 2 And behold, there was a great earthquake, for an angel of the Lord descended from heaven and came and rolled back the stone and sat on it. 3 His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing white as snow. 4 And for fear of him the guards trembled and became like dead men. 5 But the angel said to the women, “Do not be afraid, for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified. 6 He is not here, for he has risen, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay. 7 Then go quickly and tell his disciples that he has risen from the dead, and behold, he is going before you to Galilee; there you will see him. See, I have told you.” 8 So they departed quickly from the tomb with fear and great joy, and ran to tell his disciples. 9 And behold, Jesus met them and said, “Greetings!” And they came up and took hold of his feet and worshiped him. 10 Then Jesus said to them, “Do not be afraid; go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee, and there they will see me.”

11 While they were going, behold, some of the guard went into the city and told the chief priests all that had taken place. 12 And when they had assembled with the elders and taken counsel, they gave a sufficient sum of money to the soldiers 13 and said, “Tell people, ‘His disciples came by night and stole him away while we were asleep.’ 14 And if this comes to the governor’s ears, we will satisfy him and keep you out of trouble.” 15 So they took the money and did as they were directed. And this story has been spread among the Jews to this day.

16 Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. 17 And when they saw him they worshiped him, but some doubted. 18 And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 19 Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” (Matthew 28:1–20 ESV)

This is the Word of the Lord; thanks be to God!

The purpose and emphasis of this text is revealed very clearly and succinctly in verses 6 and 7, listen to them again; the angel says:

Come, see the place where he lay. 7 Then go quickly and tell (Matthew 28:6–7 ESV)

That’s the TWIN heartbeat of this passage. We are to come and see and then we are to go and tell. Charles Spurgeon said memorably here:

“Make sure about the fact for yourselves, and then let others know of it. What you know, tell; and do it ‘quickly’. Swift be your feet; such good news as you have to carry should not be long on the road.”²

I think that is excellent advice and it takes us right to the heart of the matter. This text is telling us

² Charles Spurgeon, *Commentary On Matthew: The Gospel Of The Kingdom* (Edinburgh: The Banner Of Truth Trust, 2013), 437.

to SEE some things and then to SAY some things so we'll use that as a guide for our discussion. First of all then, this text is telling us to COME AND SEE – well what? What does this text want us to see?

Come And See:

Well, I think the first thing, quite obviously is:

1. The empty tomb

The angel says:

Come, see the place where he lay. (Matthew 28:6 ESV)

The angel was very concerned for these ladies to SEE inside Jesus' tomb – that's why he went to the trouble of rolling the stone away. He didn't do that so Jesus could get out – he did that so they could get in. He wanted them to SEE that Jesus had RISEN FROM THE DEAD.

He wanted them to SEE that Jesus HAD BEEN THERE, but he WASN'T THERE any longer. Jesus didn't cheat death, he defeated death – everything we talked about on Good Friday really did happen. Jesus drank the cup to the dregs – he became sin – he died for our sins – he descended to the dead – and then he broke the gates of hell right off their RUSTY, BLOOD STAINED HINGES – and walked boldly out the front door!

Thanks be to God, brothers and sisters – JESUS ROSE FROM THE DEAD!

Come and see the empty tomb!

Because SEEING IS BELIEVING! It was for the disciples too. In John's Gospel the Apostle tells us that when the women came and told the disciples what they had seen, Peter and John ran off on foot to see the empty tomb for themselves. John 20:4 says:

Both of them were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. 5 And stooping to look in, he saw the linen cloths lying there, but he did not go in. 6 Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went

into the tomb. He saw the linen cloths lying there, 7 and the face cloth, which had been on Jesus' head, not lying with the linen cloths but folded up in a place by itself. 8 Then the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed (John 20:4–8 ESV)

Seeing is believing!

Now for us, living so far removed in time from those events, we see with our ears! But don't despair, because Jesus actually says that there is a **BIGGER BLESSING** for those who can't see the empty tomb and all the **PHYSICAL EVIDENCE** with their eyes. He said that to Doubting Thomas. He said:

“Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.”
(John 20:29 ESV)

So blessed are those who see with their eyes but even more blessed are those who see with their ears!

Blessed are those who **SEE** the empty tomb and understand that when Jesus tells you he's going to do something – he **ACTUALLY DOES IT**. Blessed are those who see and believe that there really is **LIFE AFTER DEATH**. Blessed are those who **SEE** and **RECEIVE** the **VICTORY** that is ours now through Christ.

Blessed are you who **SEE** and **BELIEVE**!

So come!

Come and see the empty tomb – because Jesus rose **BODILY** from the dead.

That's the second thing Matthew wants us to see:

2. The body of Jesus

Look again at Matthew 28:8-10. The angel has shown the women the empty tomb and then he sends them out to find the disciples, but Jesus intercepts them on their way. The text says:

So they departed quickly from the tomb with fear and great joy, and ran to tell his disciples. 9 And behold, Jesus met them and said, "Greetings!" And they came up and took hold of his feet and worshiped him. 10 Then Jesus said to them, "Do not be afraid; go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee, and there they will see me." (Matthew 28:8–10 ESV)

Now, why did Jesus intercept these women as they hurried to carry out the angelic mandate? Because he wanted to be absolutely sure that from the first time this message was shared it would be shared accurately and completely. He wanted the women to know that he had risen **BODILY** from the dead. His was no **MERE SPIRITUAL RESURRECTION**.

There was no body in the tomb because **JESUS WAS WALKING AROUND WEARING IT**.

The women would know that now because they had just taken hold of his **FEET!**

Their hands didn't go through what **LOOKED TO BE HIS FEET** – their hands **TOOK HOLD OF HIS ACTUAL FEET!**

Jesus rose from the dead and ascended into heaven in a literal, physical, touchable **BODY!**

Now why is that so important? Well for one thing it strongly suggests that heaven is an actual place where there is space and time – after all human beings require such things to exist in any meaningful sense. Heaven is not just a state of mind – because human beings cannot exist in bodies in a state of mind.

So that's a good thing.

In addition it strongly suggests God is not **ALLERGIC** per se to human beings, because it does **SEEM** that way sometimes when we read the Bible. In the Bible the presence of the Lord is **TERRIFYING** and even **DESTRUCTIVE** to the bodies of human beings. When Isaiah saw the Lord he said:

"Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the **LORD** of hosts!" (Isaiah 6:5 ESV)

The Hebrew word translated there as “lost” actually means “ruined or disintegrated”. Isaiah saw the Lord and literally started to come apart at the seams. Why? Because he was a sinner and God has a settled antagonism toward sin. If sin is in you then the Presence of the Lord will not be an enjoyable experience. If you go into the Presence of God covered in your own sin, his HOLINES will literally blow you apart.

And so sometimes it does SEEM as if God is allergic to people – but that isn’t quite right. He isn’t allergic to people – he is ALLERGIC, if we can use that term – to human sin. But if you can get that out then you are welcome in.

And that’s kind of the point of the whole story isn’t it?

The Gospel isn’t about us leaving our bodies behind so that we can hang out with God in some sort of non-material dimension – that’s Gnosticism actually – the Gospel is about getting the sin out of people so that we can enjoy the presence of God in the new heavens and new earth – as human beings – for all eternity.

Life everlasting will be HUMAN LIFE everlasting. You will drink water from the river of life, you will eat from the tree of life, you will walk down the streets of gold and you will live in a literal mansion. You will recognize your friends and loved ones who also knew the Lord. It will be HUMAN LIFE - with God – and over everything else in creation – just like it was originally meant to be.

We know that because Jesus came out of the tomb IN A PHYSICAL BODY – thanks be to God!

Thirdly, the text invites us to come and see:

3. The motivation of those who refuse to believe

This must be important or Matthew wouldn’t have included it. He tells us that while the women were going off to share the Good News with the disciples, the soldiers were telling the chief priests all that had just taken place around the tomb. But unlike the disciples, the chief priests were not willing to believe the report that they had heard. They didn’t dispute the facts – they just

refused to wrestle with the implications. So they invented a story and they bribed the Romans who would normally have put the guards to death for failing in the execution of their duties.

All the Gospels make it clear that the chief priests and other Jewish leaders were WILLFUL in their rejection of Jesus – meaning, it isn't that they just couldn't put the pieces together – they didn't WANT to put the pieces together. They were motivated by jealousy and ambition. John says that too during his telling of the story about the raising of Lazarus. He says that the report of what had happened came to the council and immediately they recognized the implications. They said:

“What are we to do? For this man performs many signs. 48 If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him, and the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation.” (John 11:47–48 ESV)

Are you hearing that? They knew that Jesus was going to turn the world upside down and when everything landed they would no longer be in charge. Verse 53:

So from that day on they made plans to put him to death. (John 11:53 ESV)

That's what this is about. It was never about evidence – all the evidence pointed in the other direction. Think about it – if the disciples really did STEAL the body of Jesus from the tomb then why didn't the Romans prosecute them for that? D.A. Carson says here:

“Molesting graves was a serious offense in the ancient world, subject at times to the death penalty.”³

So why didn't the Romans arrest the disciples on that charge? Because it was never credible! For one thing, there was only one male disciple who was brave enough to stand anywhere near the cross of Jesus Christ when he was executed. The Apostle John was related in some way to the High Priest so he was immune from abuse and mistreatment – but the rest of the disciples had already abandoned him and fled for their lives! There was only 1 left! There was one man and 3 women still standing with Jesus when he died. How could 1 man and 3 women overpower a guard of professional soldiers? That defies imagination and the Romans never thought it credible – that's why not 1 of Jesus' disciples was ever arrested for grave robbing. The Romans knew that the Jewish leaders had prosecuted Jesus out of jealousy and so they never bought the cover story.

³ D.A. Carson, *Matthew Chapters 13 Through 28* in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1995), 591.

Whatever happened – the Romans were sure, that wasn't it and Matthew wants to be sure that you understand that too. The tomb wasn't empty because the disciples stole the body – the tomb was empty because Jesus rose PHYSICALLY from the dead.

Thanks be to God – that's what you need to SEE in this passage.

Now, what do we need to say?

The angel sent the women out with a message and Jesus sent the women out with a message – and then Jesus sent the disciples out with a message. This Good News – APPARENTLY – IS MEANT TO BE SHARED! So what are we supposed to say?

Very quickly then, because what we SAY comes out of what we have SEEN, I think we are supposed to say:

Go And Tell:

1. That Jesus really was and is who he said that he was

The empty tomb makes a pretty convincing argument that Jesus was exactly who he said he was. Jesus said some incredible stuff about himself. He said for example that he had never sinned. He asked the crowd in John 8:

Which one of you convicts me of sin? (John 8:46 ESV)

And no one answered anything! If I ever asked that question there would be a line up of people down the aisle and out the front door. And that's why I've never asked! But Jesus claimed to be sinless – and the fact that he was able to walk out of death, reclaim his body and stroll out the front door of the tomb seems to suggest that he was correct in making that assertion.

And Jesus claimed that he had come down from heaven. He said that several times – he said that to Nicodemus in John 3:13.

No one has ascended into heaven except he who descended from heaven, the Son of Man. (John 3:13 ESV)

He said I'm going to do something nobody has ever done before. I'm going come down to earth from heaven and then I'm going to go back up whenever it suits me. That's a pretty impressive thing to say – and it's even more impressive if you go ahead and do it – and Jesus did.

And of course there is the fact that Jesus claimed to be God. That's what sealed his fate at his trial before the Sanhedrin. He was put under oath and the High Priest asked him:

“Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?” 62 And Jesus said, “I am, and you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power, and coming with the clouds of heaven.” (Mark 14:61–62 ESV)

Again – that's an incredible thing to say, but the fact that he rose from the dead and went up and sat down at the right hand of Power seems to suggest that it was true.

The empty tomb and the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead seems to say – and therefore we should say – that Jesus WAS EXACTLY WHO HE CLAIMED TO BE.

So go and tell the world!

Tell the world that Jesus was the sinless, perfect, blameless Lamb of God. Tell them that he came down from heaven, died on the cross, rose again and ascended to the Father's right hand. Tell them that Jesus is God in the flesh – the one mediator between God and human flesh – tell them that, because that is the heart of the heart of the Gospel.

And secondly, make sure you tell them:

2. That his death really did pay for the sins of us all

The Apostle Paul said that in 1 Timothy 2; he said that Jesus:

gave himself as a ransom for **all**, which is the testimony given at the proper time. (1 Timothy 2:6 ESV)

So make sure that you don't turn the Gospel into a private message for a privileged few. Jesus told the disciples to take this message to the nations – to every tribe, tongue and nation on planet earth.

Brothers and sisters we mustn't allow the Gospel to become associated with one group of people only. It was BIGGER than the Jews and it is BIGGER than North America or EUROPE or Latin America – it's as big and as wide as the whole world – so let our telling of this story be as big and as wide as the whole world.

We need to tell every man, woman and child on this planet that Jesus came and lived and died for them. And then – to cap it all off – he rose from the dead and he told his disciples to SPREAD THE NEWS. So let's do that.

And when you do it, make sure you do it right. Make sure you tell people:

3. That there is life (physical, social, familial LIFE) beyond death and the grave

Jesus intercepted the women to make sure that when they told the story they told it RIGHT. So getting it right matters! When we tell this story we need to talk about heaven as if it is the sort of place that normal people would actually WANT TO GO TO. Sometimes we talk about heaven as if it is some kind of creepy “abode of souls” with unending organ music – but that's not what the Bible says! The Bible says that our eternity with God will be PHSYICAL! We are going to have BODIES! There is going to be FOOD! There better be food!

If I go to the Wedding Supper of the Lamb and they are serving “metaphorical food”, I am going to be very upset! I was promised actual food! The Bible says:

“Come, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and he who has no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price.” (Isaiah 55:1 ESV)

My Bible says that in heaven there is going to be FOOD and its going to be FREE so make sure you tell people about that.

Jesus ate fish and broke bread with his disciples in his resurrection body – why do you think he did that? He did that to show them that they would do that. So you need to tell people about that! The new world is going to be physical, there is going to be food and there is going to be family. Jesus promised Peter that; he said:

“Truly, I say to you, **in the new world**, when the Son of Man will sit on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. 29 And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or lands, for my name’s sake, will receive a hundredfold and will inherit eternal life.” (Matthew 19:28–29 ESV)

Did you hear that? He says we’re going to have fields, houses, brothers, sisters, fathers, mothers and children. More even than we had on earth.

I assume that means that while I had 1 believing mother and 2 believing grandmothers on earth – to that will be added all the believing great great grandmothers I never got to experience in my physical life – but if they were in Christ, then they’ll be there! And so I will be well mothered in eternity! And I assume it means that all my church family mothers will be there too so I may be OVER MOTHERED in eternity; that’s what it sounds like – and I think people need to hear that particularly if they haven’t enjoyed that – or if they had that and then lost that, here on earth.

The new world is not going to be some kind of super-spiritual fairy world – we know that because Jesus rose BODILY from the dead! He rose BODILY from the dead so that we could rise BODILY from the dead – and so we will.

We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, 52 in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed. (1 Corinthians 15:51–52 ESV)

You better make sure you tell people that!

That’s our message! That’s our hope! That’s the Gospel, brothers and sisters – thanks be to God! Let’s pray together.